

Michael Edwards

Tragedy in Antiphon 1, *Against the Stepmother*

It is a privilege to contribute to a volume in honour of Georgia Xanthakis-Karamanos, whose own contributions to the study of Greek drama, especially tragedy, have been so extensive and influential, as also has been her work on rhetoric and the relationship between tragedy and rhetoric.¹ That relationship has recently been explored again by David Sansone, in a controversial book, *Greek Drama and the Invention of Rhetoric*,² which has received mixed reviews.³ My purpose here is not to consider the merits or otherwise of Sansone's argument that 'the development of rhetoric was directly inspired by the creation of the new, even revolutionary, genre of tragic drama',⁴ as opposed to the more traditional view that rhetoric influenced tragedy,⁵ but rather to take another look at the undoubtedly tragic elements in what has claims to being the earliest surviving speech in the corpus of Attic oratory, Antiphon 1, *Against the Stepmother*.⁶ Any attempt to link these directly to recent tragic performances is, to my mind, a vain one, simply because we do not know the dates of many of the plays or indeed of the speech itself.⁷ Rather, in my opinion these elements, combined with other stylistic usages, should be taken first and foremost as indicators of Antiphon's fine oratorical technique.

In *Against the Stepmother* Antiphon's unnamed client prosecutes his stepmother for the killing of his father. The father was entertained to dinner in Pi-

1 See her early article 1979, 66–76.

2 Sansone 2012.

3 'It is, indeed, one of those books that every reader is happy to have read even though she doubts that it will fully convince anyone': Scodel 2013. See also Lloyd 2013, 457–459; Stewart 2014, 26–28.

4 Sansone 2012, 4.

5 See, for example, Lloyd 1992.

6 For texts, translations, discussions of and commentaries on the speech see Blass / Thalheim 1914; Gernet 1923; Wijnberg 1938; Maidment 1941; Barigazzi 1955; Due 1980, 16–28; Gagarin 1997 and 2002; Gagarin / MacDowell 1998.

7 The dating of the speech is a matter of controversy. Older scholarship, such as Blass 1887, vol. 1, 193; Jebb 1893, vol. 1, 67; and Maidment 1941, 12, would see speech 1 as being a product of Antiphon's earlier development. This view was challenged by Dover 1950, 44–60, who suggests a date between 418/17 and 416/15; and his sequence for the surviving court speeches of 6, 1, 5 is followed by Gagarin 2002, 139. I would still myself prefer a much earlier date, perhaps as far back as the 430s. See Edwards 2000, 236.

raeus by his friend Philoneus, whose mistress (or παλλακή) served them wine poisoned with what she believed to be a love potion. Philoneus, receiving a larger draught, died instantly and his friend twenty days later. The mistress was a slave, and so was tortured and executed by relatives of Philoneus. Some years later, on reaching maturity, one of the friend's sons, in accordance with his father's deathbed injunction, prosecuted his stepmother, whose defence was conducted by one of her own sons, the half-brothers of the plaintiff.

With no substantial evidence to rely on, Antiphon constructs for his client a vivid and largely imaginary narrative of these events. Its dramatic tenor was noted many years ago in the Budé edition of Louis Gernet. Commenting on the words which introduce the narrative, Gernet writes:

Δίκη δὲ κυβερνήσειεν. Expression poétique, qui prélude assez naturellement à la narration dont la couleur n'est point celle de la prose judiciaire (notamment § 17, τὸν ἑαυτῶν φονέα, « leur meurtrier », en parlant de la coupe empoisonnée; cf. Soph., *Ajax*, 815 et 1026). Dans la seconde partie surtout – dans la scène du meurtre – ce récit fait penser à celui d'un messenger de tragédie; l'auteur y met visiblement quelque complaisance.⁸

Similarly, Adelmo Barigazzi comments:

L'espressione è senz'altro poetica, ma non è il caso di pensare alla chiusa d'un esametro desunta da qualche poeta. Essa appartiene al tono elevato e poetico che caratterizza la narrazione.⁹

On the narrative itself Bodil Due remarks:

This narrative is the broadest and most vivid in the extant speeches of Antiphon ... The litigant obviously strives to create an atmosphere filled with terror and vague presentiments, which is strongly reminiscent of tragedy, especially, as observed by *Gernet*, of the messenger-speeches.¹⁰

Finally, Michael Gagarin notes, also with reference to Gernet, that 'A. here produces a vivid account which has been likened to a messenger speech in tragedy'.¹¹

There are a number of features of the narrative, and other parts of the speech, that support this consensus opinion. These include:

⁸ Gernet 1923, 42 n. 1. For the personification Wijnberg 1938, 93, compares Hes. *Theogony* 902; Soph. *OT* 274.

⁹ Barigazzi 1955, 87.

¹⁰ Due 1980, 20.

¹¹ Gagarin 1997, 114.

(i) The striking metaphor in § 20: τὸν ἑαυτῶν φονέα μεταχειριζόμενοι ('taking hold of their own killer'). Parallels for this, as Gernet noted, are Soph. *Ajax* 815–816, ὁ μὲν σφαγεὺς ἔστηκεν ἧ τομώτατος γένοιτ' ἄν ('the slayer stands where its stroke will cut sharpest') and 1026, ὕφ' οὗ φονέως ἄρ' ἐξέπνευσας ('your killer that took your final breath'), and Due adds Eur. *IT* 586, οὐχὶ τὴν ἐμὴν φονέα νομίζων χεῖρα ('not thinking my hand was a murderer'). Barigazzi comments 'tutta la frase ha colorito poetico, è piena di solennità e gravità tragica',¹² and he rightly defends the Greek text of the sentence τὸν ἑαυτῶν φονέα μεταχειριζόμενοι ἐκπίνουσιν ὑστάτην πόσιν ('taking hold of their own killer, they drink it down, their last drink') by reference to Aeschyl. *Cho.* 578, ἄκρατον αἶμα πίεται τρίτην πόσιν ('[the fury] will drink unmixed blood as her third drink'). I note also a fragment of Euripides (912.7 N), which contains the verb in the context of holding Zeus' sceptre (σκῆπτρον τὸ Διὸς μεταχειρίζεις).

(ii) A second vivid metaphorical usage is found in § 17: ταῖς Κλυταμῆστρας τῆς τούτου μητρὸς ὑποθήκαις ἅμα διακονοῦσαν ('following the advice of Clytemnestra, this man's mother').¹³ Barigazzi notes that Antiphon would have been about 20 years old when Aeschylus' *Oresteia* was performed in 458,¹⁴ and Gagarin comments 'the name adds to the tragic tone of the narrative, in which several passages seem intended to recall the *Oresteia*'.¹⁵ This is fine, but there were, of course, other versions of the myth, in tragedy and other poetry (starting with Homer, *Odyssey* 11.405–434), which could equally have influenced Antiphon. His use of the name of a character from mythology is exceptional in the orators: all the commentators note the only parallel at And. 1.129.¹⁶ This may be another sign of the lack of real evidence in the case, with Antiphon relying on the metaphor to kindle in the jurors the male fears of women that are a feature of so many tragedies (joined to the theme of the wicked stepmother). The metaphor helps to draw attention away from the fact that much of the narrative is the pure invention of its narrator (here the imaginary thoughts of the *pallake*).

(iii) As we noted above, a third striking metaphor, with poetic flavour,¹⁷ is found in the words that introduce the narrative in § 13, Δίκη δὲ κυβερνήσειεν

¹² Barigazzi 1955, 91.

¹³ I adopt the text of Gagarin here.

¹⁴ Assuming a birth date around 480, with Ps.-Plutarch, *Mor.* 832F.

¹⁵ Gagarin 1997, 116.

¹⁶ τίς ἂν εἴη οὗτος; Οἰδίπους, ἢ Αἰγισθος; ἢ τί χρὴ αὐτὸν ὀνομάσαι; ('Who would he be himself? Oedipus or Aegisthus, or what should we call him?').

¹⁷ As Gagarin 1997, 27. His other examples of poetic metaphor come from speeches 5 (§§ 37, 77, 93) and 6 (§ 21). More examples of metaphorical expression are given by Cucuel 1886, 28–9: 1.13, 17, 20, 2.1.7, 2.2.13, 2.3.10, 4.10, 3.2.10, 3.3.4, 4.2.7 (wrongly given as Γγ7 by Cucuel), 5.37, 71, 86, 94.

(‘may Justice be my guide’). This metaphor, however, recalls not tragedy, but Pindar, *Pyth.* 5.122–23, Διός τοι νόος μέγας κυβερνᾷ δαίμον’ ἀνδρῶν φίλων (‘the mighty mind of Zeus governs the destiny of men he loves’; cf. *Ol.* 12.3–5, *Pyth.* 10.72). Nor is it only poetic: it is also paralleled later in Plato, *Euthyd.* 291c-d:

Σωκράτης

ταύτη τῇ τέχνῃ ἢ τε στρατηγικῇ καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι παραδιδόναι ἄρχειν τῶν ἔργων ὧν αὐταὶ δημιουργοὶ εἰσιν, ὥς μόνῃ ἐπισταμένη χρῆσθαι. σαφῶς οὖν ἐδόκει ἡμῖν αὕτη εἶναι ἣν ἐζητοῦμεν, καὶ ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ὁρθῶς πράττειν ἐν τῇ / πόλει, καὶ ἀτεχνῶς κατὰ τὸ Αἰσχύλου ἱαμβεῖον μόνῃ ἐν τῇ πρύμνῃ καθῆσθαι τῆς πόλεως, πάντα κυβερνῶσα καὶ πάντων ἄρχουσα πάντα χρήσιμα ποιεῖν.

Socrates

To this art, we thought, generalship and the other arts handed over the management of the productions of their own trades, as this one alone knew how to use them. So it seemed clear to us that this was the one we were seeking, and was the cause of right conduct in the state, and precisely as Aeschylus’ line expresses it, is seated alone at the helm of the city, steering the whole, commanding the whole, and making the whole useful.¹⁸

Socrates refers to the similar metaphor at Aesch. *Septem* 2, but there the verb used is in fact φυλάσσει: ὅστις φυλάσσει πρᾶγος ἐν πρύμνῃ πόλεως (‘whoever guides affairs at the stern of the state’).

(iv) Poetic vocabulary and phraseology make a further contribution to this picture. The first port of call here is the dissertation on Antiphon’s language and style by Cucuel, who discusses *Expressions poétiques* on pp. 22–23.¹⁹ Cucuel is conservative in his approach,²⁰ but he identifies eighteen expressions in the Antiphon-tean corpus as poetic, two of which are used twice and the great majority of which are found in the *Tetralogies*.²¹ There are two in speech 1, both of which are both found not in the narrative, but in the proofs section: ἡ εἰμαρμένη (§ 21) and ἀθέμιτα (§ 22).²² It is interesting that the closest parallels for the expression

¹⁸ Transl. Lamb 1952.

¹⁹ For Cucuel, see n. 17 above.

²⁰ ‘Mais s’il s’agit de déterminer les expressions poétiques, la tâche devient moins facile’ (p. 22).

²¹ ἀθέμιτα (1.22; Cucuel misses an example in 4.3.6); ἀσμος (2.4.8); ἄωρος (3.1.2, 2.12); ἄωρι (2.2.5; Cucuel misses examples in 2.1.4, 4.5); γηραιός (3.2.11, 4.1.2); ἔμφρων (2.3.2); ἐπιπορότατος (6.33; Cucuel misses an example in 6.48); εὐδία (2.2.1); ἡ εἰμαρμένη (1.21); ἡλίθιος (2.2.3); καταπηγνύναι (fig. 11); κηλὶς (3.3.8; Cucuel misses an example in 3.3.11); μῆνιμα (4.2.8; Cucuel misses examples in 4.3.7, and possibly, depending on text, 4.10); νήπιος (3.2.11); ὀπτῆρ (5.27); συλλήπτωρ (3.3.10); συμπράκτωρ (3.4.6); φροῦδος (5.29).

²² Listed by Cucuel as ἀθέμιτα, which according to *LSJ* is the poetical spelling; Gagarin, like Blass/Thalheim in the Teubner, prints ἀθέμιτα at 1.22, but ἀθέμιτα at 4.3.6, on which he notes

ἡ εἰμαρμένη ('his appointed time', sc. μοῖρα),²³ are found in prose, in Plato (e.g. *Gorgias* 512e) and Demosthenes (e.g. 18.205). Harvey Yunis comments on Dem. 18.195, 'this word is uncommon in Attic oratory (here and §205 out of eight instances); it is so markedly poetic (*LSJ* s.v. μείρομαι III) that it lends Athens' fate the feel of tragic necessity'.²⁴ More questionably, E. R. Dodds comments on *Gorgias* 512e, 'in the Homeric sense of the appointed death-day. Though the word is not found as a noun before Plato, it seems to be drawn from the language of poetry'.²⁵ But this use in Antiphon is similar to that in Plato. As well as in epic, the expression (though not, I note, precisely the same one) is found in Aeschyl. *Ag.* 913, θήσει δικαίως σὺν θεοῖς εἰμαρμένα ('[the rest my vigilance] will order justly, with the gods' aid, what is appointed'),²⁶ and Soph. *Trach.* 169, τοιαῦτ' ἔφραξε πρὸς θεῶν εἰμαρμένα ('such things, he declared, were appointed by the gods'). On the plot of the *Trachiniae*, Bruce Heiden writes 'when Deianeira learns that Heracles has brought a young concubine under their roof, she tries to ensure his fidelity by secretly exposing him to a substance she believes has aphrodisiac properties'.²⁷ This in many respects makes Deianeira a closer parallel to the stepmother than Clytemnestra, but we cannot draw any inferences over the temporal relationship of the speech with this play as the date of the *Trachiniae*, as with most of Sophocles' plays, is notoriously difficult to establish.²⁸ As for ἀθέμιτα/ἀθέμιστα, this form is not found in Aeschylus or Sophocles,²⁹ though both use forms of θεμιτός/θεμιστός negativised by οὐ: Aeschyl. *Septem* 694 (οὐ θεμιστοῦ), *Cho.* 645 (οὐ θεμιστῶς); Soph. *OT* 993 (οὐ θεμιστόν), *OC* 1758 (οὐ θεμιτόν). Euripides has the form twice, at *Ion* 1093 (ἀθέμιτος) and *Phoen.* 612 (ἀθέμιτόν σοι);³⁰ see also Aristophanes, *Pax* 1097 (ἀθέμιτος). But again I should point out that the parallel uses of the neuter plural are found in prose, both before and after Antiphon (Hdt. 7.33; Xen. *Mem.* 1.1.9, *Cyr.* 1.6.6).

(1997, 170) that this form 'is fairly common in prose', though ἀθέμιστα is only found in prose of the fifth and fourth centuries in (the non-Attic) Herodotus (7.33, 8.143) and a fragment of Dinarchus quoted in a later source (Bachm. Anecd. 41.1).

23 As Gagarin 1997, 118; Gagarin / MacDowell 1998, 14

24 Yunis 2001, 216.

25 Dodds 1959, 350.

26 Though the text here has been doubted.

27 Heiden 2012, 129.

28 See, e.g., Hoey 1979, 210–232, who suggests c. 450. For Easterling, 'any date between 457 and, say, 430 would not be implausible' (Easterling 1982, 23). But other scholars prefer a later date, e.g. Vickers 1995, 41–69 (425/4).

29 The reference to Sophocles in Bachm. Anecd. 41.1 to Sophocles (fr. 742 P) is extremely dubious. See Conomis 1975, 146 (fr. 6 with apparatus).

30 Though ἀθέμιτόν is Bothe's correction of the mss οὐ θεμιτόν.

(v) Cucuel goes on to list ‘un certain nombre de mots techniques, si l’on peut dire, que l’on désigne souvent sous le nom d’archaïsmes ou de locutions poétiques, paraissent appartenir à un vocabulaire consacré’.³¹ Again, these are mostly found in the *Tetralogies*, but one occurs in the same passage of the proofs as the two listed above: τὸν αἰδίου χρόνον (§ 21). Poetic parallels at *Homeric Hymn* 29.3 and [Hes.] *Scut.* 310 are noted by Wijnberg,³² but we should also note here Barigazzi’s comment, ‘la frase sembra avere carattere poetico, ma αἰδίου entrò per tempo nella prosa ed ebbe lunga vita’, with reference to Thuc. 4.63.1.³³

(vi) To Cucuel’s lists may be added ἥδη meaning ‘forthwith’, another mainly poetic usage which is found in the narrative (§ 20); and οἱ, the old form of the reflexive pronoun, also found in the speech’s narrative (§ 16). The latter is mostly poetic, but it also occurs at 5.93; Thuc. 2.13.1; And. 1.38.³⁴

In addition to vocabulary there are dramatic features in the narrative, which I have discussed elsewhere but may be summarised here.³⁵ Most of the sentences are brief, with three or four short cola, which produces a staccato effect. There are, however, some longer cola, which coincide with key points in the narrative, which itself is tripartite: §§ 14–16 (ὑπερῶν τι ... ὥς οἶμαι), §§ 16–18 (μετὰ ταῦτα ... τοῦ φαρμάκου), and §§ 18–20 (ἐπειδὴ γὰρ ... θέλωσιν). The colon comprising fourteen words in § 15 contributes to the longest sentence in the narrative, where the stepmother tells the *pallake* that she knows how to restore their respective men’s affections.³⁶ Another longer colon, of fifteen words this time in § 19, opens the dramatic sentence that vividly narrates how the *pallake* poured the drink while the two men were offering their prayers – prayers which were never to be answered.³⁷ The longest colon, of twenty-two words in § 16, is found towards the start of the second part of the narrative, in a transitional passage where Philoneus has the idea – an ‘excellent’ one but of course tragically fatal – of accompanying the

31 Cucuel 1886, 23.

32 Wijnberg 1938, 122 n. 5.

33 Barigazzi 1955, 94.

34 Other old-fashioned or rare prose usages in the narrative are the rare use of the aorist infinitive καταστήσαι after ἔμελλε (§ 14; see Barigazzi 1955, 88) and the old use of ὅς as a demonstrative pronoun in καὶ ἡ (§ 16; cf. Hdt. 8.87.2). Note also the τε ... τε ... correspondence in § 18, which is very frequent in the *Tetralogies*, but more common in poetry.

35 Edwards 2004, 51–63.

36 ἔφη ἰκανὴ εἶναι ἐκείνη τε τὸν Φιλόνεων φίλον ποιῆσαι καὶ αὐτῇ τὸν ἐμὸν πατέρα (‘she said that she was capable of renewing Philoneus’ love for her and my father’s for herself’).

37 ἡ δὲ παλλακὴ τοῦ Φιλόνεω τὴν σπονδὴν ἅμα ἐγχεύουσα ἐκείνοις εὐχομένοις ἃ οὐκ ἔμελλε τελεῖσθαι (‘Philoneus’ mistress, pouring the libation at the same time as they were uttering prayers which were not to be fulfilled’).

father to Piraeus.³⁸ Finally, a colon of seventeen words in § 18 marks the start of the transition to the third part of the narrative, where the narrator becomes overt and prepares the listener/reader for the dramatic scene of the poisoning by skipping over the dinner to the pouring of the fatal libation.³⁹

Another feature of the long sentence in § 15 is the use of the vivid historic present tense in μεταπέμπεται and ἐθέλει. This use of the present, which recalls the effect of the tense in Euripidean messenger-speeches,⁴⁰ becomes particularly noticeable in the poisoning scene. In § 19 the *pallake* gives her man more (πλέον δίδωσι),⁴¹ which of course ironically kills him quicker; and in § 20 the two men, taking hold of their own killer, tragically drain their last drink (τὸν ἑαυτῶν φρονέα μεταχειριζόμενοι ἐκπίνουσιν ὑστάτην πόσιν).⁴² Philoneus vividly dies (ἀποθνήσκει) immediately, the father ‘falls into’ (ἐμπίπτει) sickness. In consequence, the *pallake* ‘has’ (ἔχει) the punishment she deserves, even though she is in no way to blame (οὐδὲν αἰτία οὔσα), and in contrast the stepmother who was to blame ‘will have’ it (ἔξει).

To conclude, there is no doubt that Antiphon’s prosecution of the stepmother as the killer of her husband is reminiscent of a well-known tragic narrative, and the speaker’s case relies heavily on that fact. With no real evidence, as far as we can tell, he constructs an at least plausible case against the stepmother that deliberately recalls (but adapts) the situation of Orestes in the *Oresteia*, and particularly his trial in the *Eumenides* for avenging the murder of his father by his (in that story natural) mother.⁴³ Antiphon will have expected the jurors of the Areopagus to relate to that and indeed question why his client’s half-brother was defending this monster, even if she was his mother. The circumstances of the case perhaps made these dramatic

38 κάλλιστον οὖν ἐδόκει εἶναι τῷ Φιλόνεω τῆς αὐτῆς ὁδοῦ ἅμα μὲν προπέμψαι εἰς τὸν Πειραιᾶ τὸν πατέρα τὸν ἐμὸν φίλον ὄντα ἑαυτῷ (‘it therefore seemed to Philoneus to be an excellent idea to escort my father, his friend, to Piraeus’). Note also the role of chance here (ἔτυχε).

39 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἄλλα μακρότερος ἂν εἴη λόγος περὶ τοῦ δείχνου ἐμοὶ τε διηγέσασθαι ὑμῖν τ’ ἀκοῦσαι (‘now it would take too long for me to narrate and for you to hear the story of the dinner’). The transition is also marked by the striking verbal periphrasis with an abstract noun in ὡς γεγένηται ἡ δόσις τοῦ φαρμάκου (see Gagarin 1997, 28–29, 116); and by the use of the particle γάρ, which very frequently in the orators indicates the start of the narrative (it is similarly delayed in Lys. 12.4 and 6).

40 As noted by Gagarin 1997, 117, following de Jong 1991, 38–45.

41 Note the further emphasis given here by the delta and pi alliteration in δεξιὸν ποιεῖν πλέον δίδωσι. Also, the triple use of ἐγγέω; as Gagarin points out (1997, 116) the ‘use of the same verb for pouring the libation and the poison emphasises the impiety of the crime’.

42 ‘Tragically’ not only in the expression but also in its rhythm: ἐκπίνουσιν ὑστάτην πόσιν fit an iambic trimeter.

43 The case is evidently weak, but not necessarily hopeless. See, e.g., Gagarin 1997, 106.

allusions inevitable, but Antiphon makes full use of them, thereby indicating why he was worthy of a place in the canon of ten Attic orators.

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